

*The
Humble Annals
of a
Back Yard*



Walter A. Dyer

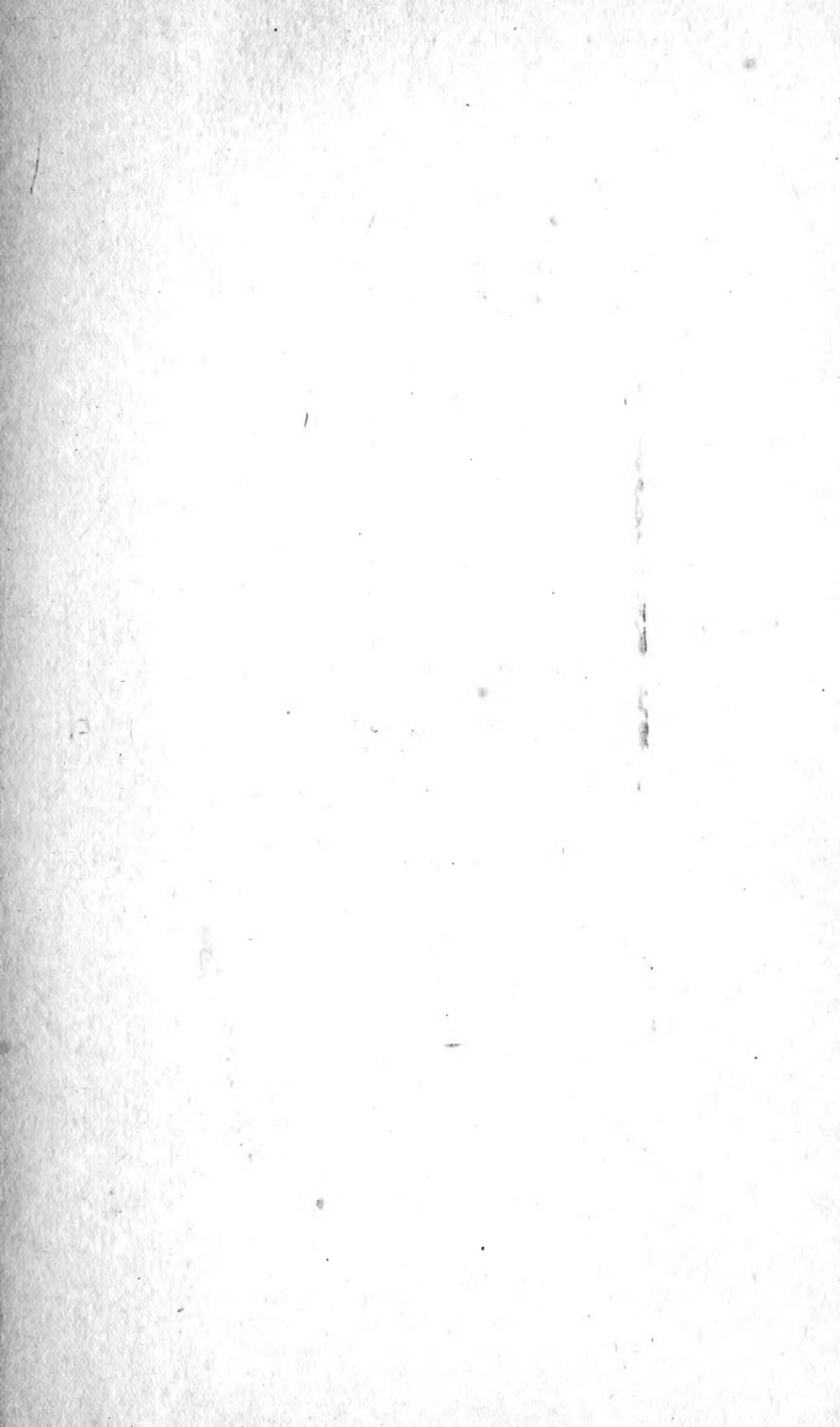


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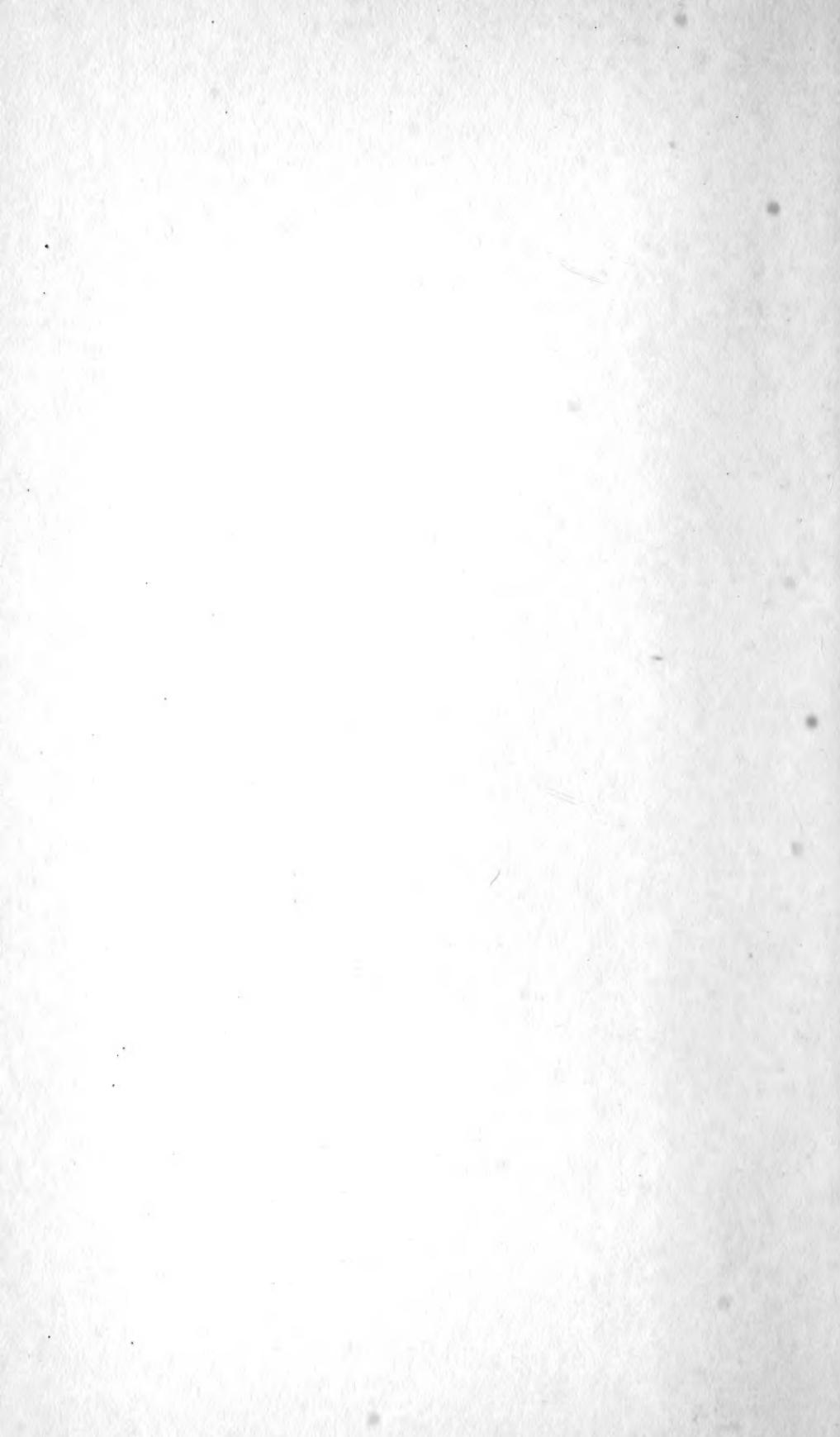
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**THE HUMBLE ANNALS
OF A BACK YARD**





The
Humble Annals
of a
Back Yard
by
Walter A. Dyer

Illustrated by
Frank T. Merrill

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Acknowledgment

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Dedication

*To those who love a small rectangle of God's
earth that is a part of home*

*To those who know the joy of helping on the
life of things that grow and bear fruit*

*To those in whose hearts there is a special
shrine set apart for flowers*

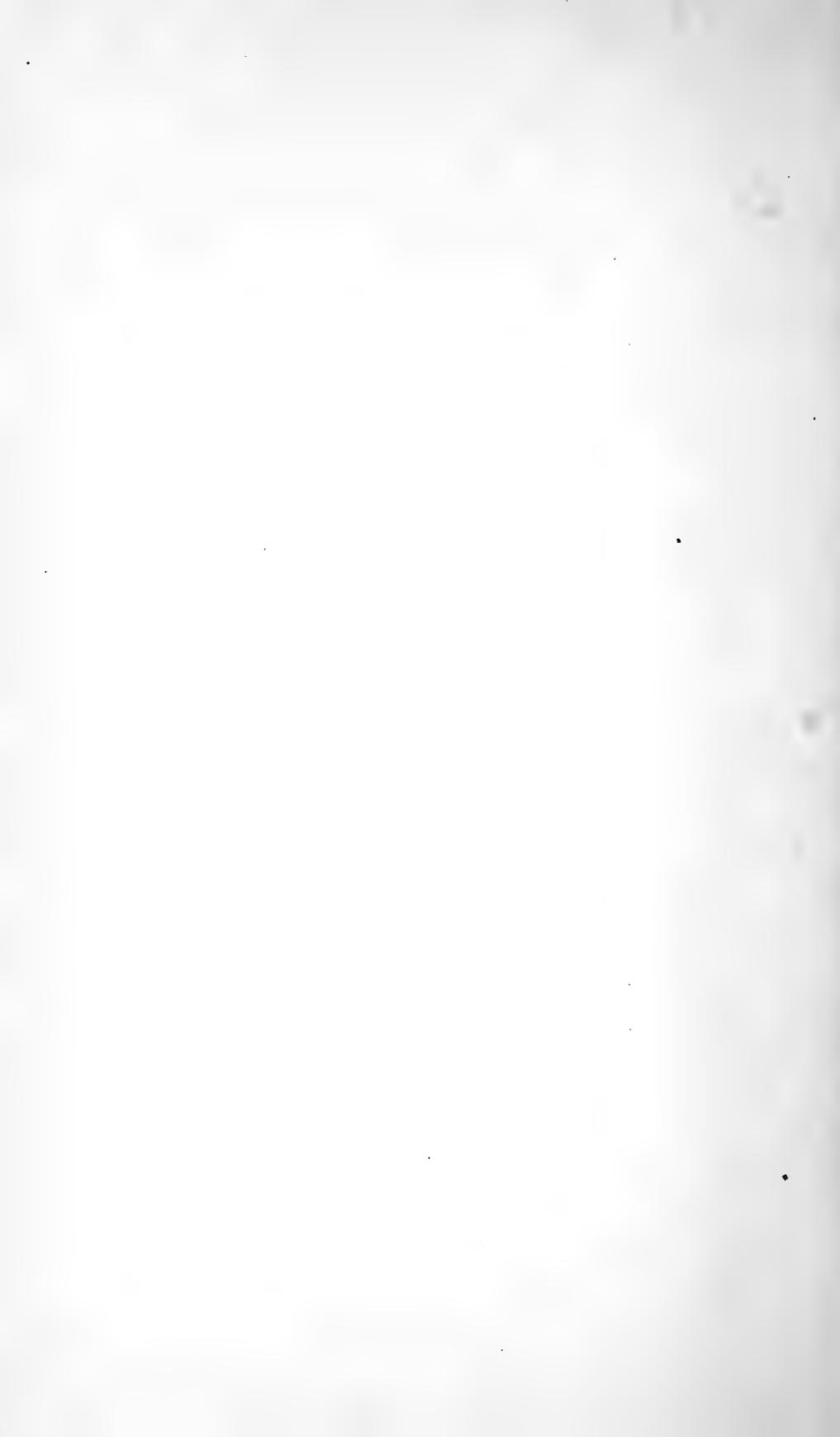
*To all the wide Brotherhood of the Back
Yard*

This slender volume is lovingly dedicated

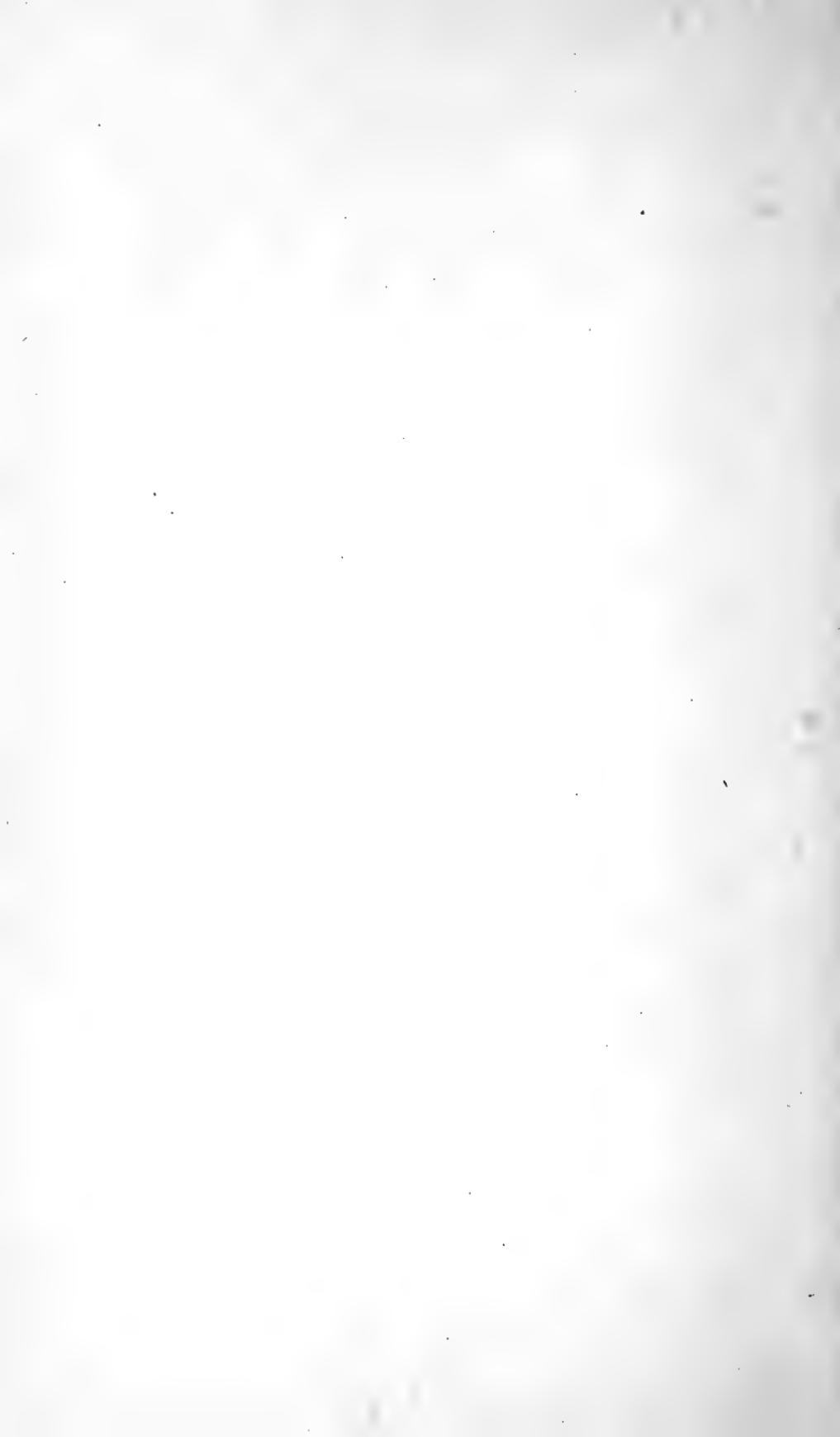


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**THE BACK-YARD
BROTHERHOOD**





The Back Yard Brotherhood

THERE are just four kinds of people in this world: people who have no back yards at all, people who own back yards by proxy, people who possess back yards unwillingly, and people who live in their back yards.

Among the first class may be mentioned Eskimos, wild men of Borneo, convicted criminals, and New York flat-dwellers.

The second class includes

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boarders and the very rich. The former gaze out upon the landlady's back yard, and the latter upon the gardener's back yard.

The third class consists largely of bridge players, business men, and other folk to whom the back yard is *terra incognita* or an irksome appendage. In the fourth class belong you and I, and the German woman the other side of our back hedge, who raises Brussels sprouts and soup herbs, and who calls my wife her "flower friend"—we and many others. We are the Brotherhood of the Back Yard, and these are the articles of our profession:

* * * * *

To turn aside as often as we may from the dusty street, and leave it to the people who have no back yards, or who do not understand or love back yards.

OF A BACK YARD

To spend as many hours as we may
in this secluded and delectable spot.

To plant and cultivate growing
things with our own hands—trees,
vines, shrubs, vegetables, roses, and
all the gay crowd of old-fashioned
flowers.

To open here our hearts to such of
the brotherhood as are tried and true.

To invite to the communion canine
and feline friends, birds who reward
our hospitality with songs at morn
and eventide, old people whose hearts
have grown mellow, and children who
have not yet forgotten the joy of
plucking flowers.

* * * * *

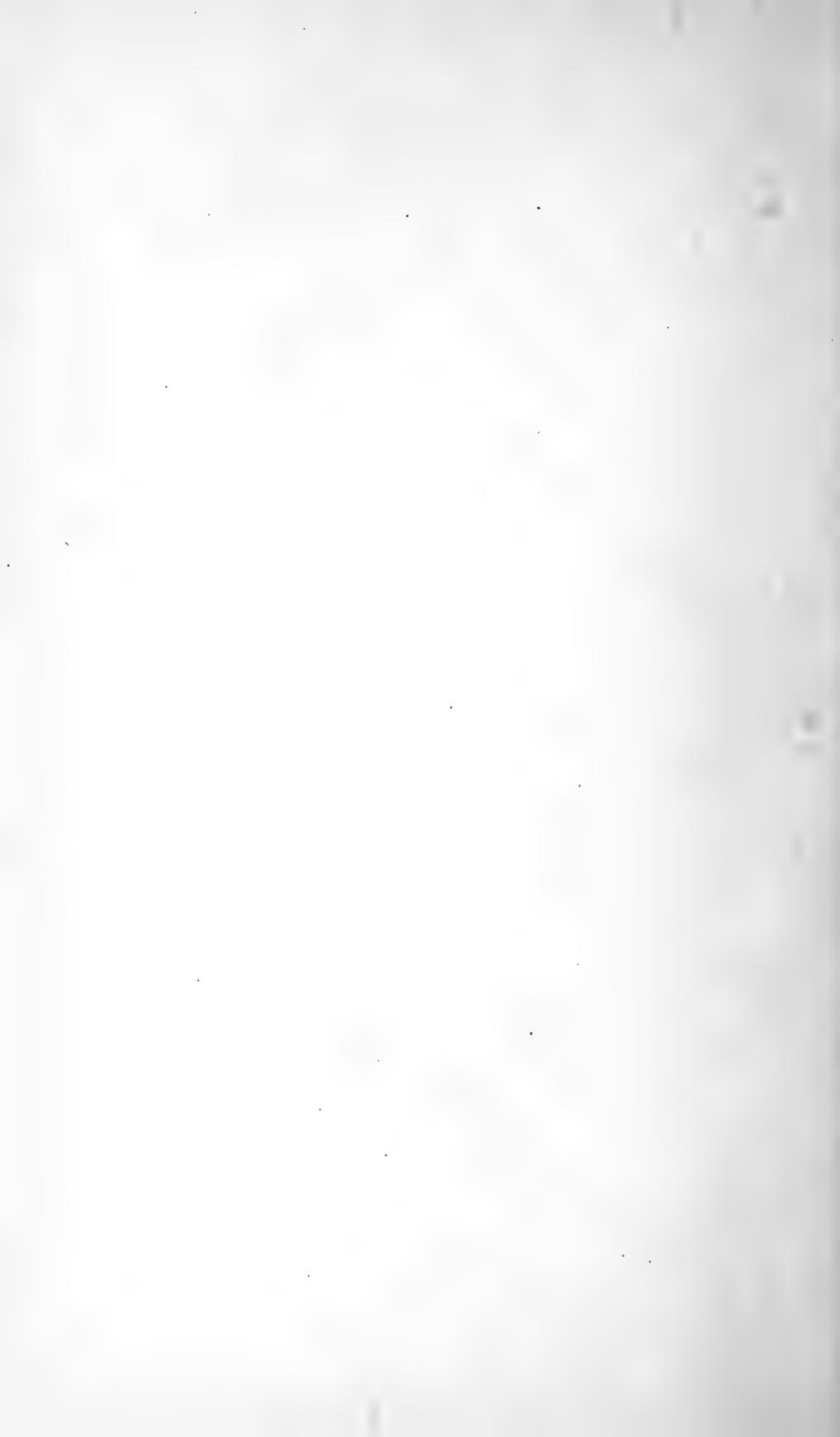
Life, as it appears to me, is a busy
street and a calm back yard, and most
of us spend too much time in the
street. There is the buying and the
selling, the money-getting and the
worry, the labor that makes the heart

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grow weary or callous, the spending and the display, the tumult and the glitter, the sin and the sordidness, and all the falseness of external things.

But for most of us, if we have not lived too long upon the street, there is a little back yard of the soul, that calls out for our care and our companionship. There, if we will, we may spend hours of genuine satisfaction. If we till the soil aright, there will spring up love and kindness and the warmth of human fellowship. And when the day's labor is done, and the little harvest of fruit or flowers is gathered, let the evening find us there.

THE COMING





The Coming

THE day we arrived our back yard was a forlorn sight enough. It was October, and the leaves and grass were brown and dis-couraged looking. Our good Irish Nellie, who had come all the way out from the city with us, had never seen a real Amer-ican back yard before, and her soul expanded; she began throwing out crates and boxes and papers and other rubbish in reckless abandon. She had

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never had such a large place to throw things into before. Later we explained to her, and picking up was simple enough, but on this first day Nellie's activities had not added to the attractiveness of the back yard.

Such vegetation as there was seemed not very inspiring—an overgrown and brittle old pear tree, vine-choked lilac bushes, a couple of rank ailanthus trees, all manner of weeds and brambles, and out in the middle of the alleged lawn a large, funereal, concrete urn, in which pansies, perhaps, had grown.

I began to reflect on the general carelessness of the human race in these latter days. When I was a boy back yards did not look like this. People seemed to care more for the growing things. There was not a yard along our street that had not its fruit trees, its grape-vines, its currant

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bushes, and its garden. I know of a number of people who have lately built homes in the suburbs, and I know not one who has planted a fruit tree or a grape-vine. Perhaps it is because they are always considering the possibility of moving on in a year or two; if so, it is a sad commentary on our stability as a people and the depth of our love for home.

But the Lady of the House joined me with shining eyes. After all, it was our back yard, and we had never had a back yard before. It was the outdoor room of our new home. It was full of possibilities, and it was ours. It gave us a feeling of proprietorship and importance quite new to us.

I began to see a vision of waving corn tassels and purple grapes, of tall dahlias and low forget-me-nots, of a peach tree and a velvet lawn—

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and the concrete vase was removed to the cellar. I conceived a new purpose in life, and that is always worth while.

“Next year,” said I, “this back yard will be a different looking place, I promise you.”

Next year it was!

ON RESCUING PATRIARCHS



On Rescuing Patriarchs



WHEN we first made the acquaintance of our back yard the outlook was disheartening enough. It was unmistakably a neglected back yard—weeds, weeds, and more weeds, rubbish and litter, and a forlorn stretch of uneven sod that defied the ministrations of a lawnmower and succumbed only reluctantly to the onslaught of hoe and rake.

It was like adopting a child

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from the slums, whose heredity was doubtful and whose present condition was obviously degraded. As to the heredity of our back yard, we later found a large portion of it to be the child of an ash-heap. But that is another story.

My first duties were those of general cleaning up, and that was work enough. It was astonishing how many undesirable things had grown up that needed to be cut down and burned, and what a litter of dull-brown leaves one unlovely old pear tree could make.

The yard's chief evidence of a past gentility lay in a row of tall lilac bushes along the fence, and I soon discovered that here my first great battle was to be fought—my Austerlitz or my Waterloo.

Four or five of these lilacs in the middle of the noble old row were

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overgrown with a dense mass of gnarled honeysuckle—overgrown, undergrown, choked almost to death, and in places quite hidden.

Now honeysuckle is a beautiful thing in its place, and if you are given to moralizing you will find a text in that.

They told me that these lilacs were doomed; that no man could possibly disentangle that mass of honeysuckle and root out the persistent vine; that lilacs and all must be cut down and the earth plowed up. I insisted that it could be done; whereat, being an acknowledged novice, I received the superior smile.

Well, I have done it! All winter it took me and some part of spring, working at odd hours when the weather permitted. Every strand was cut, painfully unwound with blistered hands, and pulled down from

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the tops of the shrubs, and every root was grubbed up or hacked to death beneath the surface of the earth.

And when spring was fully awake and every shrub bloomed—albeit some weakly—the pride of victory warmed my heart. I think I would rather have conquered that honeysuckle than have made a thousand dollars by foreclosing a mortgage. Yes—there is no doubt about it—I am quite sure I would.

But that isn't the moral of the tale. What has filled me with wonder and admiration is the vigor and hopefulness of these old lilacs. When I pulled out the honeysuckle I discovered shoots springing up from the bent and groaning stock, and reaching up sturdily toward the light through the mass of stifling growth.

Bowed down by oppressive influences, smothered by circumstances

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over which they had no control, poor, deprived of human assistance, with no apparent hope for better days, how tenaciously these old Spartans clung to life; with what faith they reached upward toward the sun; with what devotion they struggled to fulfill their destiny.

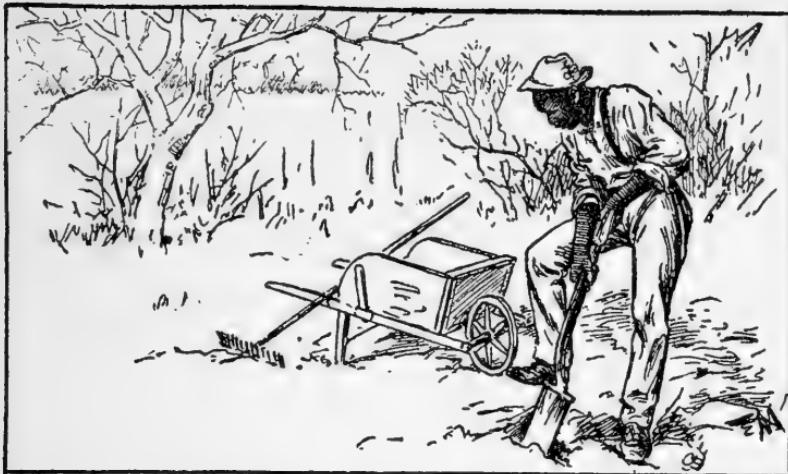
Noble lilacs, you are honored friends of mine today! I hurt you cruelly in my bungling efforts to help, but you opposed me not, neither complained, but rewarded me in due season with the fragrant gift that it is your mission to bestow on man.

Never more shall you suffer from neglect and lack of appreciation and friendship, but shall spend your latter days in peace and fruition, the honorable patriarchs of our back yard.



SUBDUIING AN ASH HEAP





Subduing an Ash heap

MY garden is like a wayward son. The very troubles I have had in bringing it up have made me fonder of it than of greater successes more easily won. At least I like to think so, though there are times—

“First have your soil in fine, rich condition.” That is the proper way for a treatise on gardening to begin. Then follow the interesting details of planting. It sounds quite

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simple. But just suppose your soil refuses to get into fine, rich condition; what then? Perhaps the best way is to go out and buy several loads of good top-soil before you plant a seed, but that isn't the way I did. I have been raising flowers and vegetables with considerable satisfaction for three years, and the soil isn't in fine, rich condition yet.

When we first came into possession of our back yard, the rear portion of it was grown up to weeds and brambles. I saw not the slightest chance of making it a part of the lawn.

“The only thing we can do with it,” said I, in my ignorance, “is to spade it up and make it into a vegetable garden.”

That is what we did. In fact, most of the waste places of the yard have been used for flowers or vegetables because they wouldn't support grass.

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Which is unorthodox and foolhardy, but I cannot say that I regret the net result.

In the early spring I went out and thrust a fork into the ground tentatively in two or three places. Then I sallied forth and engaged Mr. Jones, a dusky pillar of the A. M. E. Church, to do the spading. He did half of it, and then sent his son Leander over to finish the job. They were underpaid, I'm sure.

It developed that the foundations of my garden were prosaic coal ashes. Some gravel and a little soil, but mostly coal ashes. It dawned upon me then that former tenants had utilized this portion of the yard for their ash-heap, and it must have been a prodigiously extensive one, both in area and in depth. On nearly the whole of the plot there are ashes and cinders, and though I have spaded

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deeper each year, I still bring to light odd mementoes of a past generation in the form of straps, buckles, rusty hinges, shoes, broken china, and the like.

My faith then was greater than my garden wisdom, and I turned under a load of manure and planted seeds. The result was not a prize garden, but, all things considered, it was extraordinary. Like a *phœnix* from the ashes sprang a garden of corn and peas and beans, and we ate thereof and were glad.

Long ago I read a story by Frank R. Stockton, called “*My Terminal Moraine.*” As I remember it, the hero discovered that ages before a glacier had ended in his back yard, and he developed the theory that there must be gold somewhere in the gravel of the moraine. He sank a shaft, but found no gold. He sank another and

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another; also he sank his fortune in the enterprise. But no gold appeared. Deeper and deeper he went until, just as bankruptcy was about to force him to abandon the attempt, he discovered not gold, but ice! Great quantities of the original glacier remained unmelted deep in the earth. He accordingly went into the ice-mining business and made a fortune.

I have not made a fortune out of my terminal moraine, but in the course of my gardening I have gathered up four scuttlefuls of perfectly good coal, and that's something, at the present prices.

I shall never have a prize vegetable garden in my back yard. I know that, now. But each year I clean out a little more rubbish, add a little more fertility, and build up a little more soil, and the task is not without its compensations. Last fall I sowed

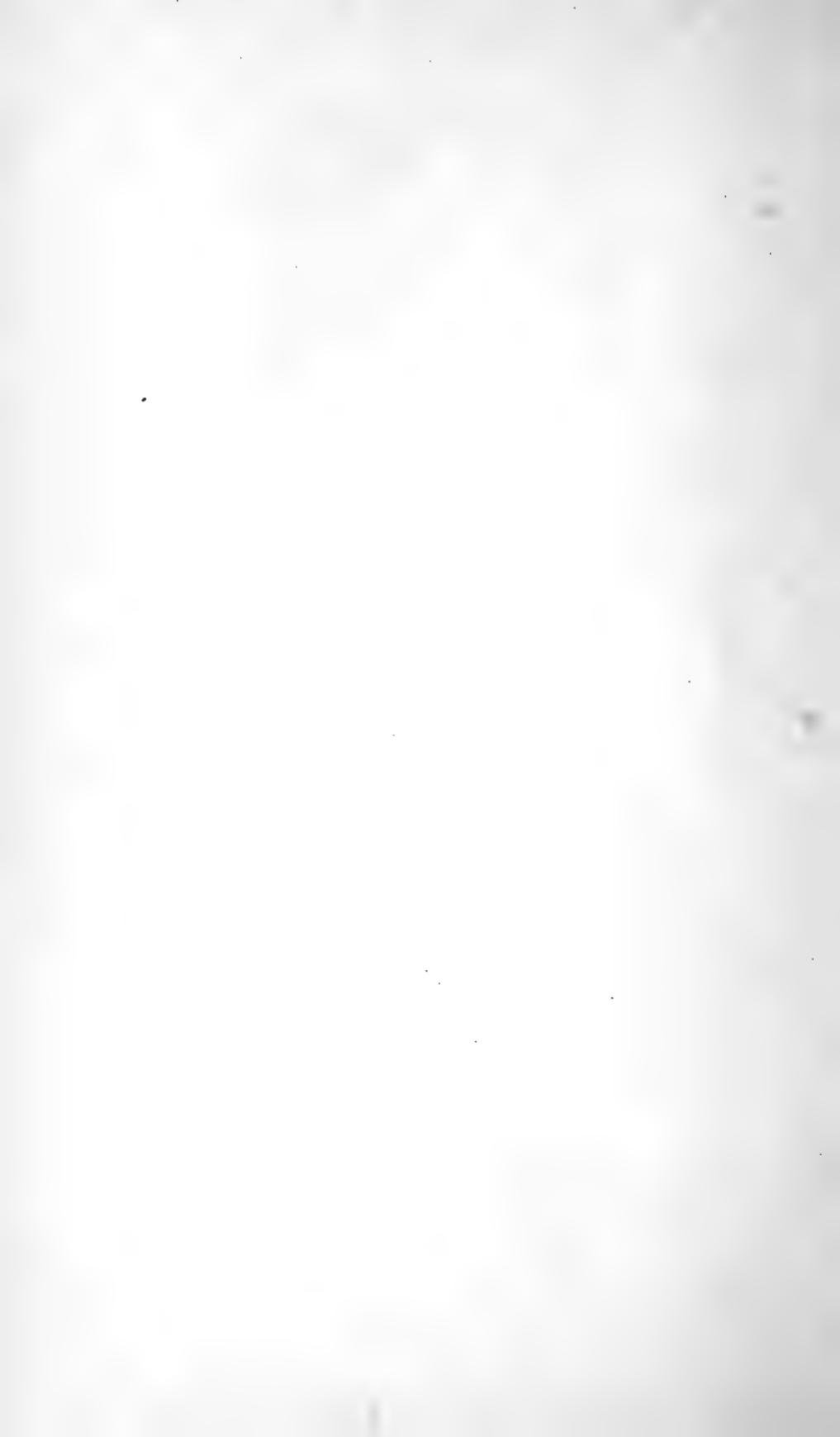
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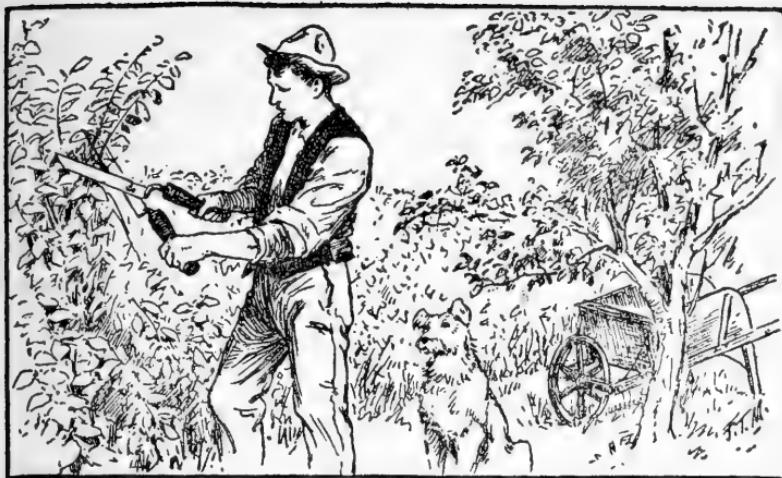
rye to turn under in the spring, and that will help.

Anyway, I am gardening for health and pleasure, not for profit; and I venture to say that I get more fun out of my gardening than my rich neighbor gets out of his, for he hires a man to have all his fun for him, just as the lazy Oriental keeps slaves to do his turkey-trotting for him. And my garden isn't half bad, if I do say it.

Now there is a perfectly able-bodied moral in this—with a number of useful applications to human life. But it is so obvious that I will simply offer you a head of my best anthracite-grown lettuce and let you do your own philosophizing on the way home.

THE FIRST CORN





The First Corn

JUST as every mother deems her own babe a marvel, calling your attention insistently to his fists, his grimaces, his tooth, and all the commonplace evidences of ordinary development, so we watched with joy and wonder the growth of our first garden, and felt surprised and hurt that the outer world should not clamor for admittance. It was a simple, amateurish garden, with dahlias at

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one end and a wealth of dwarf nasturtiums along the front. Within were newly set strawberry plants, string beans, tomatoes, lettuce, and Golden Bantam corn. The soil was poor, but by dint of much cultivating and care we made the garden a reasonable success, and Dame Nature helped us.

I think it was the appearance of the young corn-blades that brought us the greatest joy. Down in the stony, ashy earth we had placed the seed, six in a hill, and patted them down with a hoe. Every morning before breakfast we went out to see what had happened in the night. And one night was the wonder wrought. I saw them first—little, light green spears thrusting through the brown earth, where dry kernels had been planted, and I knew that Hiawatha had wrestled with Mondamin in the night. Then, with the

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early and the latter rains, came the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. And still the workaday world went on about us as though nothing had happened.

That is the way it is with all the wonders of our back yard; of them the world neither knows nor cares. And yet I know that there are other back yards—hundreds, thousands of them—all over our land, where someone is watching the annual miracle. Not all the people in the world are out on the street, where shop windows flaunt their vulgar display. Some there are still among the flowers, helping things to grow, and incidentally ministering to the welfare of their own souls.

It is easy enough to become acquainted with faces on the street, but if you would know real folks, if you would make real friends, find your

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way into the little back yards where the corn is growing and the souls of men and women are not hidden behind masks of artificiality or buried beneath the complexities of life. Quiet, simple souls, some of them, that would be unobserved on the street; souls that are still childlike enough to marvel at the sprouting of the corn; souls that linger under the apple trees because they are weary of the glare of the pavements; souls that rejoice in humble garden successes, because, perhaps, they have failed in the marts of trade; souls that have learned to find peace and contentment hiding among the weeds.

I should like to pass into such back yards and meet such souls. I am sure I would like them better than the men and women in the street. For now that I have a back yard of my own, where corn sprouts, where tomatoes

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swell and redden, where morning-glories bloom and fade, I think I could understand better those other souls whose joys are like unto these.

But I have my own yard to care for yet a little while. My garden is too poor a one to be left while I go gadding. I must needs hoe my corn, and stake my tomatoes, and trim my hedge, and shave my lawn. Perhaps when it is all done, and there is nothing more to be attempted, then I shall have nothing to do but go preaching in all the back yards of our town and showing my neighbors how to cultivate their gardens and their souls. Until then I can only shout a greeting over the fence and wish luck and joy to all the brotherhood of back yard gardeners.

ROSES





Roses

I AM not a rose expert; I am not even an experienced grower of roses. But I can safely claim to be a rose lover.

I have a vivid mental picture of a back yard of long ago in which there was a huge bush of velvet Jacqueminot roses, higher than my head, and a still bigger Paul Neyron. I know this is not the approved way to grow roses; they should be cut back for the sake of larger

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and later blooms, but they were eminently satisfactory to us. In those days the Gen. Jack was to me the rose *par excellence*; I could fancy nothing finer. In between these two were a large white rose and a pink tea, whose names I have forgotten, and in other parts of the yard were three old-fashioned, dull-red, single roses.

Since then I have always wanted roses, and the first spring after we acquired a back yard of our own, we set out a few choice varieties—Frau Karl Druschki, Killarney, Etoile de France, La France, Soleil d'Or, American Beauty, Caroline Testout, and Viscount Folkstone. It is only a little rose bed, and has not done altogether well. Caroline Testout died the first winter, and some of the others have had a hard struggle; but they have given us pleasure, and with

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more fertilizing and a little lime and continued care and cultivation, I think we shall succeed.

I still love the Jack, but have come to believe that the Killarney, with its heavenly pink blossoms and perfect buds, is the finest rose grown, though the sturdy white Karl Druschki presses it hard. The Soleil d'Or is a sort of interloper, being an Austrian briar that must not be pruned, but its clusters of golden flowers add piquancy to the garden.

Now if this were all I had to tell about roses there would be small gain in writing of them; but it has been my privilege to observe day by day a much larger rose garden and to make notes of those varieties that pleased me most. These notes I am preserving against the day when I shall have a larger back yard and greater opportunities for rose growing. Mean-

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time it has occurred to me that they might be of service to other amateur gardeners who would be planting roses.

I claim nothing for this list except that it records a rose lover's personal preferences, whereas the catalogue lists seem to claim superior excellence for every variety in them. I have arranged them according to color, which the catalogues seldom do, and, as is customary, I have let the letters **H. P.** stand for hardy perpetual, and **H. T.** for hybrid tea. Here, then, is my list:

DARK RED

Etoile de France (H.T.). Free blooming, deep crimson, very hardy. Perhaps the best known of the dark reds.

Prince C. de Rohan, or Camille de

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Rohan (H.P.). Similar to *Etoile de France* in color.

Jubilee (H.P.). Very dark and velvety. Blooms hold their color well when old.

MEDIUM RED

General Jacqueminot (H.P.). The old, unsurpassed favorite. Very desirable.

Ulrich Brunner (H.P.). Brilliant cherry red. Very fragrant.

Captain Hayward (H.P.). Similar to *Ulrich Brunner*.

John Keynes (H.P.). A free bloomer.

LIGHT RED

Captain Christy (H.P.). Not common.

Hugh Dickson (H.P.). A new rose of high quality.

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DEEP PINK

Lady Ashtown (H.T.). Sometimes a lighter pink, shading to salmon.

MEDIUM PINK

La France (H.T.). A perfect pink. Perhaps the most popular rose in cultivation. Also red and white varieties.

Killarney (H.T.). A perfect bud, opening to a semi-double bloom. Also a white form.

My Maryland (H.T.). Another beauty, with long, graceful buds.

Mme. Caroline Testout (H.T.). Similar to La France.

Mme. Gabriel Luizet (H.P.). Large, full blooms.

Mrs. John Laing (H.P.). Fragrant, free flowering. Fairly deep pink. Very sturdy.

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Souvenir du President Carnot (H.T.). Turns rather light.

LIGHT PINK

Clio (H.P.). Large blooms.

Mrs. R. G. Sharman Crawford (H.P.). Similar.

WHITE

Frau Karl Druschki (H.P.). One of the grandest, sturdiest roses grown.

Baroness Rothschild (H.P.). Turns pinkish.

Mabel Morrison (H.P.). Turns pinkish.

COPPERY AND SALMON SHADES

Mme. Abel Chatenay (H.T.). Pink flushed with orange.

Prince of Bulgaria, or Prince de Bulgarie (H.T.). A new rose of fine quality.

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Mrs. Aaron Ward (H.T.). Long stems. Color varies.

Mme. Ravary (H.T.). Beautiful orange tint. Not always a strong grower.

YELLOW

Lady Hillingden (H.T.). Rare.

Alfred Colorub (H.P.). More often red.

Gloire Lyonnaise (H.P.). Very pale lemon yellow.

Soleil d'Or (Austrian briar). Perhaps the finest of the yellows except the climbers.

FOR LARGE BUSHES

Paul Neyron (H.P.). Pink. Very hardy. Flowers are as large as a peony.

Conrad F. Meyer. A rugosa hybrid. Yellowish pink. Very fragrant and hardy.

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There are literally hundreds of others, and I know I have omitted somebody's favorite, but I can recommend this list for anyone to begin on who has a back yard and wants roses in it.

GOOD BEANS





IT was the Fourth of July and we were eating our first stringless beans of the season.

“My!” exclaimed the Lady of the House, “these beans are good!”

I was inexpressibly shocked. It was as though Eve had glanced appreciatively about Eden and said, “This is a nice little garden, Adam. Try one of these early apples.” But I

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perceive that my state of mind needs explanation.

It was this way. I had been spending my holiday in the back yard in preference to the crowded excursion train or the vulgar bathing beach. In the forenoon the sun poured down such an insistent heat that the lettuce leaves curled up limply and the grape-vine tendrils drooped. The silk was beginning to show on the corn where the ears were forming. The corn evidently liked the hot, dry weather, but I didn't. As I straightened up after working between the rows I fancied I felt a slight dizziness and I hastily sought a shady spot.

As I stood there, hatless, leaning on my hoe, and enviously watching a sparrow disporting himself near my lawn sprinkler, it suddenly came over me what an extraordinary bit of creation this back yard of mine is.

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There are lots of things I don't know about it, but I know enough to marvel at. In the beginning it was Chaos and black Night, like everything else. Then came the cooling and wrinkling of the earth's crust, and volcanic upheavals; and when this ages-long tumult had subsided, and the dry land and the sea were set in their proper places, my back yard was some fathoms below the surface of the deep.

One would have thought that its fate was sealed, and that it could never hope for a higher destiny than that of an oyster-bed. But the great Craftsman had a nobler mission for it. Perhaps he had a divine vision of my lawn and garden and locust tree.

Anyhow, one geologic day a great ice river, miles and miles wide, came creeping down from the frozen North. Over hill and valley it crept in its

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ponderous, irresistible flow, across Green Mountains and Berkshires, shearing off mountain tops as it came, and grinding them into pebbles and sand.

But the weather turned warm again, and the huge glacier met a torrid wave from the south. The battle with wind and sun was fought at the edge of the sea, and gradually the ice army was forced to retreat, leaving behind it the wreckage of war—huge granite boulders from Vermont, pieces of flint from Canada. And at the scene of the first great battle it left a heap of sand and gravel so great that when it melted it spread out into the sea. Little water courses formed and the sand pile was flattened and drained. Then the tides cut a channel through behind the last bulwark of low hills, and left Long Island and my back yard a dry desert of sand.

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Meanwhile, all over the world, trees and flowers and all manner of plants had been learning how to grow and be beautiful, and birds and winds and hairy animals scattered their seeds far and wide. Sand-favoring grasses took root, and in due time Long Island became a waving prairie. Then came the various soil-making processes of growth and decay, and in a jiffy followed red man and white, and our village, and the little white house wherein **I** dwell.

How complete it all seems to me now, as though the final consummation had been wrought for me and the **Lady of the House**, that we might have a small spot of green for our souls to grow in. Soil, seed, and sunshine, all for us. Doubtless it seems the same to the lowly and beneficent toad that spends his days beneath the tomato vines. But **I** could not help

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wondering, as I stood there in the pleasant shade, if this were not also a mere transition stage on the way to something far more beautiful ages hence.

And so, as I say, I was shocked when the Lady of the House lightly remarked, "These beans are good!"

"Madam," said I, after an impressive pause, "the Lord made these beans."

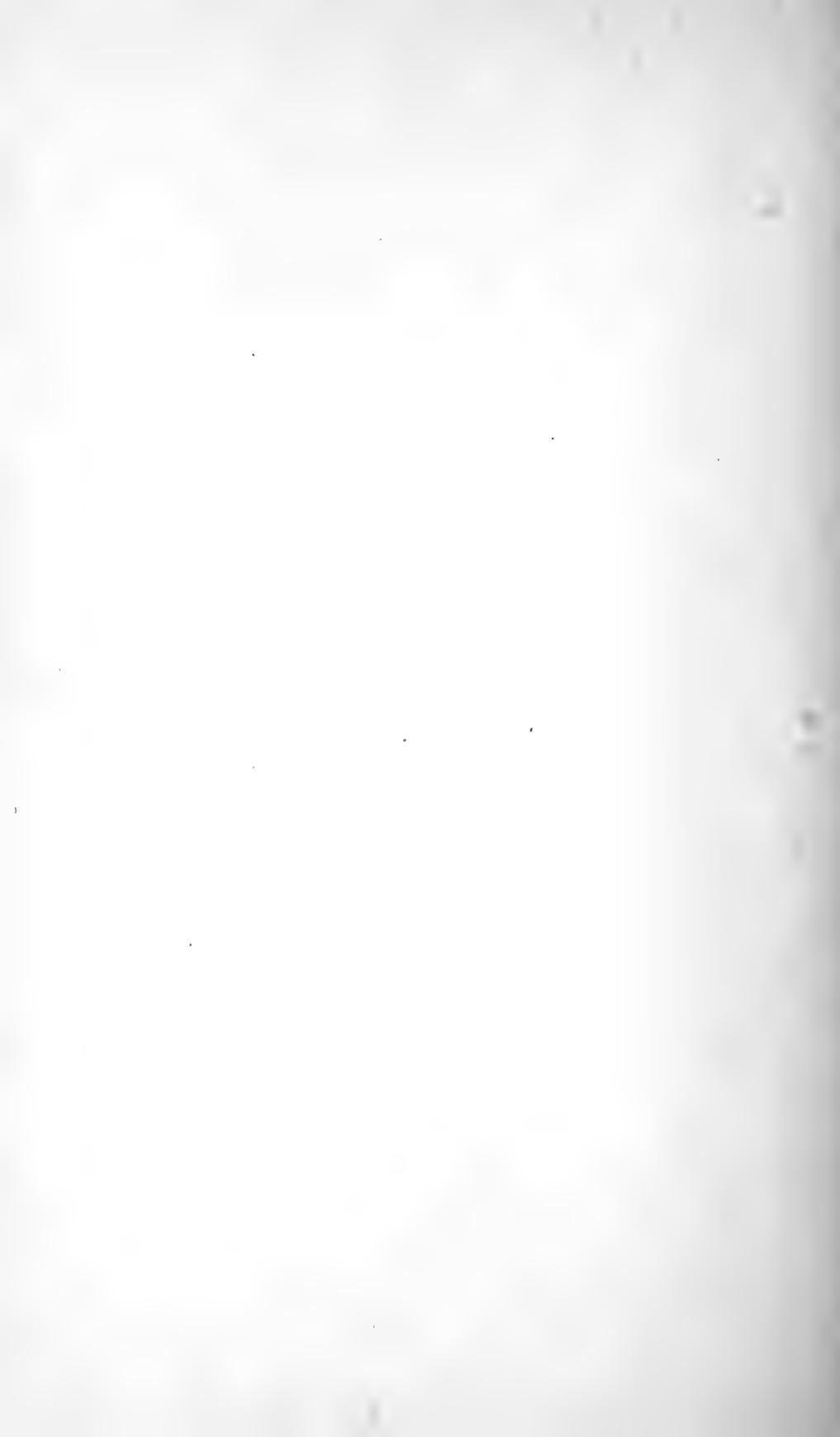
But Madam had been canning peas and was not in my frame of mind.

"If it hadn't been for the man who perfected this strain of seed," she retorted, "and if you hadn't fertilized that garden for three years, and if you hadn't planted the seed at the right time and the right depth, and if you hadn't kept out the weeds, and cultivated during the drought, I guess they would be a sorry mess."

Madam was right. It is inspiring

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to realize that we have some part in creation, after all. To this extent, at least, the Doctrine of Free Will holds. I can leave my back yard to the rag-weed and burdocks, or I can make it to blossom as the rose. So I trust I am not irreverent or unduly prideful if I declare, "The Lord and I, we grew these beans."



MORNING CHAPEL





Morning Chapel

I AM not one of those garden enthusiasts who arise at beauty-sleep time and go out to work feverishly with trowel and hoe for an hour or two before breakfast. For one thing, waking up is a long and solemn rite with me, not to be hurried through thoughtlessly. If I get down by the time the coffee percolator is bubbling I feel quite sufficiently virtuous. And though I pride myself on being

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a conscientious gardener, I take my garden pleasures calmly and at such times as circumstances grant me leisure. I do not hotly pursue joy in my garden: I jog along comfortably with it.

But if by some lucky chance I beat the coffee percolator by five or ten minutes, I do enjoy a tour of the back yard while the dew is on the grass—a brief but unhurried tour of critical observation not unmixed with a sort of morning adoration. It seems to start the day right, somehow.

In college days we were most of us opposed to compulsory worship on general principles; and yet I know that if a poll had been taken of the undergraduates, there would have been an overwhelming majority in favor of morning chapel. It was a traditional exercise that we would not have wanted to abolish if we could.

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Not that we felt the need so much of a daily religious service; morning chapel was rather a social observance. It got us together as a college; the ties were knit closer; the day was started as it should be in such a community.

And so now I like to foregather with my tomatoes and my beans, my Shirley poppies and my roses, before they and I actually buckle down to the day's work that is appointed to us.

Already the shadows are shortening and the sun is pouring his vitalizing beams upon all the growing things. The robins that seem to have a nest high up in our ridiculous old pear tree are singing joyfully because the weather is what it is, and a kindly mortal has spread before them a feast of worms.

There are prayers said in this morning chapel. Here is a row of seedlings praying for water; there is a

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groaning dahlia praying for a stake. But for the most part there is a hymn or two of praise and then a gay commingling in social intercourse; and if there is a mild undercurrent of worshipful intent, that is all the religion I and the garden seem to require.

Our back yard is small; the garden is lilliputian. And yet within its modest boundaries I can always find more joyful surprises in my short perambulation than a day in the whirling city can offer me. Never a morning, between frost and frost, that does not present some new attraction unsuspected or only hoped for the day before. The buds have broken on the grape-vine; or a yellow crocus is in bloom; or the first tender green of the lettuce shows in a delicate line on the brown soil; or our first rose has appeared; or there are tiny pods on the pea-vines; or the corn is in tassel; or

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a tomato glows rich red; or—but the list is endless.

Oh, it is worth while to plant and tend and garner! I cannot understand the man or woman with a back yard who is blind to these morning surprises, and deaf to the call of his bit of the soil. I cannot understand the heart that will deliberately close its doors to these free and God-given joys.

I am one of those fortunate ones who can go to work afoot, and after breakfast I can prolong my morning chapel, in a manner, by glimpses into other yards along the pleasant way to the shop. I like to fancy that Dr. Ludlow is rejoicing over the full-blown beauty of his symmetrical cherry tree, or that Mrs. Saunders has gazed with astonished delight that morning upon her first pink peonies. I wave a mental salutation

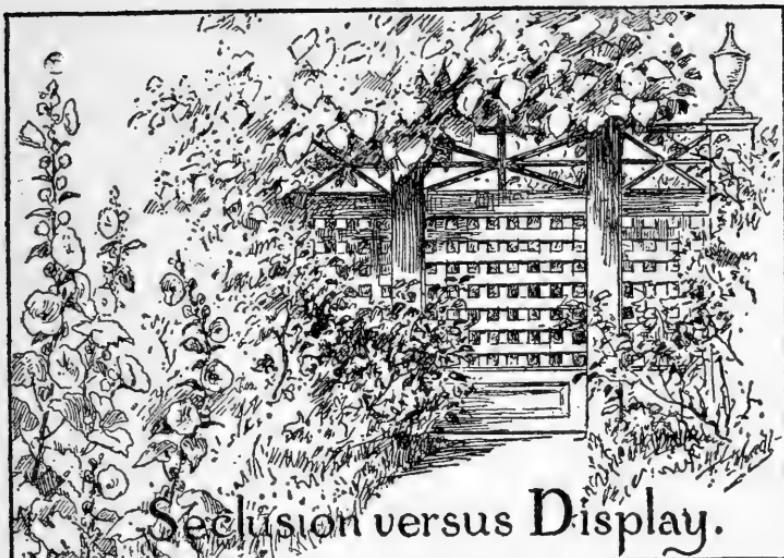
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as I pass, and feel that we understand each other.

And then in June there is the square white house with the super-gorgeous array of blue corn-flowers and pink roses behind it. I mean to get acquainted and enter that back yard some day. I feel that it would be worth while. I know that it would put our humble rose bed to shame, though I am still haunted by the conviction that our Killarneys are just a shade the finest roses ever grown in the open.

God bless you, brother backyards-men! May your lettuce never fail to head nor your hollyhocks to bloom. And at your morning worship know that I am with you in spirit, and that our common text is "Consider the lilies."

SECLUSION VERSUS DISPLAY



Seclusion versus Display.

BENEATH the big maples in front of the house a lawn has but little chance; at least I haven't been able to do much with mine. Nevertheless, I mow it and dress it, and scratch grass seed into the thin spots, and take twice as much care of it as I do of the lawn back of the house.

I wonder why this is. Can it be that, in spite of all my boasted independence of spirit,

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I do care for what the neighbors think? That I prize the fancied approval of the chance passer-by?

For some such reason, I suppose, I have planted a mock orange at one side of the steps and a pink weigela at the other, and a privet hedge along the sidewalk; purple and white crocuses in the grass in front of the piazza at one side, yellow and white crocuses at the other side, white snowdrops and blue scillæ under the old syringas by the fence, and a row of daffodils and narcissi down the side of the house, visible from the street.

For the same reason, I suppose, I am inordinately proud of my lilacs in May, the whole noble row of which may be seen and admired and smelled from the road.

I fancy this desire for display is very human, and I doubt if it is very

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wrong. There is a marked tendency among garden critics to deplore the instinct that expresses itself in front-yard tulip or geranium beds and in flaming rows of cannas, scarlet sage, and coleus before the house. There is now in flourishing existence a gardening cult that would hide all horticultural activities behind a screen and even confine the garden within high walls or hedges. Privacy and a secluded home life are its watch-words.

Doubtless some such propaganda is needed in a country where the acquiring of fortune so often outstrips the growth of culture and good taste; but it is equally possible that the pendulum may be swinging too far in that direction. I certainly do not wish the world to come crowding into my back yard, nor do I wish it to think me a miser with my crocus gold.

There is a serious sociological

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principle at the bottom of all this. Shall Americans tend to become seclusive Little Islanders, or shall the community be deemed greater than the home?

Gardening confined entirely to the back yard or the enclosure takes no account of neighborhood improvement or the pleasure of the passer-by. It should be possible to maintain privacy and homelike garden content without depriving the community of the benefit of attractive door yards and pleasant streets. It should be possible for the gardener to arrange his vines and shrubs and flowers in such a way that both ends may be attained, and he can at once "live in his house by the side of the road and be a friend to man."

NATURE NEAR HOME





Nature near Home

MOST of us are a bit far-sighted when it comes to the enjoyment of nature. We fix our gaze on the distant wonder, overlooking the little miracle beneath our feet. We seek wild life in Canada or the Rockies, under the delusion that our own farms and gardens and back yards are thoroughly tame. We envy the opportunities of the professional naturalist or sportsman, neglect-



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ing the adventure of an early-morning tour of the corn field or the hardy border.

The great northern diver is a bird no more fascinating to observe than our every-day, humorous crow; the scarlet tanager of the nearby woods road is every whit as brilliant as the flamingo; a starling has more character than a stork; the squirrels of Boston Common are as impudent and as graceful as those of Pike's Peak.

To see and to comprehend the little dramas of nature that are enacted just outside our windows requires a mind and senses more keenly alive and more accurately adjusted than to appreciate the majesty of the caribou migration or the duel of elks in the Yellowstone.

In spring there is the coming of bluebird and robin, the building of nests and the rearing of young; in

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mid-summer the pageant of blossom and fruit passes before our hypermetropic eyes, and our friend the toad sits beneath his lettuce leaf and performs his marvels unobserved; in the fall nature makes feverish haste to be beautiful before youth is gone, and if we will but glance up from the morning paper now and then we may be lucky enough to see the flying wedge of the south-bound geese; in winter comes the brave chickadee in search of food, and in the morning we may find the lacy track of the deer-mouse across the new-fallen snow.

Sometimes, when Nature knocks at our doors, it is not to call us to distant hunting grounds, but that she may come and lodge with us.

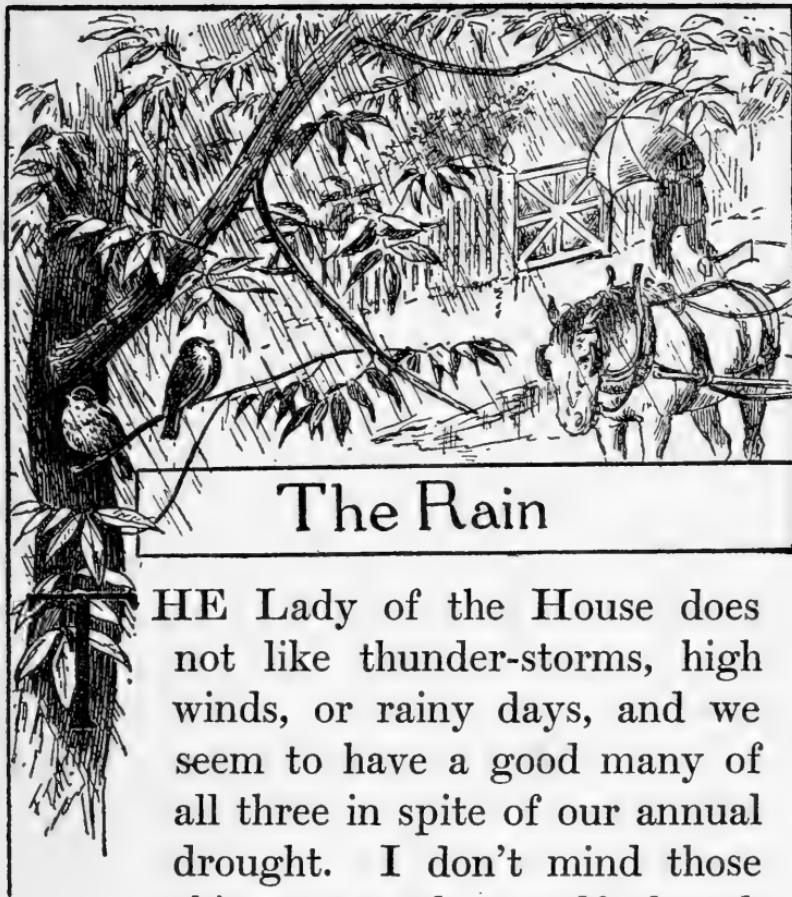
Thus it is in our back yard. There is plenty of natural history here for home-loving folks with open eyes. The wonder of growing things—of

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bursting seed and opening flower—fills every nook and corner. The sparrow builds her improvident nest just above our heads. The toad appears like a jinnee out of a bottle and performs conjuring tricks with his tongue. On a June morning there is a marvelous cecropia on the door screen, and always there is the mystery of the spider's web to contemplate. Nature avoids not our humble corner of the earth in the working of her miracles.

THE RAIN





The Rain

THE Lady of the House does not like thunder-storms, high winds, or rainy days, and we seem to have a good many of all three in spite of our annual drought. I don't mind those things so much, myself, though I hate to see branches blown from the trees, and I am not free from the depressing effects of a long rainy spell.

But there is a kind of rainy day that I like. It comes after

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a dry spell, when we have had plenty of sunshine and the garden is parched with thirst.

The sun went down in a golden haze, and in the morning we awoke to hear the steady rattle of the rain on the piazza roof. Out in the back yard the garden is drinking eagerly, and already the corn has taken on new life; it seems to have grown an inch. The grass and the lilac leaves are washed a clean, glistening green; the dahlia buds nod heavily in the dripping from the ailanthus tree above them. One of my tomato vines lies prostrate, perhaps from a too copious imbibing of the life-giving fluid.

Then I turn to the front of the house, for there is the impression I like to receive. A lone pedestrian hurries up the street, his umbrella held at an angle against the slanting spears of rain. Across the street and

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a little way down a covered grocer's wagon stops and a man in rubber coat and boots jumps out and dashes around the house with a basket. The horse stands and nods exactly as the dahlia buds do.

The rain comes down so steadily as to produce the effect of a fog, half blotting out the landscape and changing the aspect of familiar objects. All the sharp angles are softened a little, and the motion of the rain gives the scene a look of unreality as though it were a moving picture. All the colors are changed. There is no blue overhead, only a dull, slaty gray that casts its tone over all the landscape. Green, red, white, yellow, all are grayed as with the broad wash of an artist's brush. Only the brown of the tree trunks appears to stand out darker and more vividly. Our street seems turned into a Japanese print.

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The grocer's man comes hurrying out and leaps into his wagon. The horse starts off at a smart trot and the street is deserted. I peer through the rain at the houses opposite, but detect no sign of life in the windows. It is as though the world were asleep, awaiting the coming of the Prince to kiss it awake again.

I alone of all the village seem to be alive and stirring. I am shut into a little world all my own. I experience all the joy of solitude and none of its pain. The witchery of the rain makes me as lonely as a mountain in the clouds and I surrender to the enchantment.

A FLOWER LOVER'S CREED





A Flower Lover's Creed

MY friend the horticulturist humbles me continually. He is gracious enough when I go to him for advice, but when, in the enthusiasm of some new discovery, I undertake to impart information, he cools my ardor with an indulgent smile.

He knows too much, this horticulturist. He knows so much that I sometimes wonder if he has any room left for pure appreciation of flowers. For

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when I stand in my own little back yard, and gaze fondly on my sprawling nasturtiums and my hoydenish morning-glories, I know in my heart that it is a matter of love rather than of knowledge. I become a rank Philistine, and don't care a jot whether I am conforming to the rules of gardening or not.

Who laid down these rules, anyway? Was it not some garden lover who codified his experiences and beliefs? And must I be bound by his code? Let's have a little free thinking in this garden business, say I.

When it comes to a choice of flowers, it is, I firmly believe, all a matter of taste. I will not scorn the nasturtium or the morning-glory because they are common and easy to grow. Rather, I love them the better on that account.

And so I have made a creed of my

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own, and I submit that my creed is as good as any other man's. Like all creeds, it is arbitrary and dogmatic, but it is mine own, and I care not whether anyone else may choose to adopt it or not, so that I be left undisturbed in my garden beliefs.

* * * * *

I believe in roses, because they are the most perfect flowers that grow.

I believe in the crocus, the snow-drop, and the bluebell, because they are brave and usher in the garden year.

I believe in some of the tulips—gesneriana and picotee—but not the gaudy Dutch sorts that grow in round beds in parks.

I believe in phlox when it is pure pink or white, but not the magentas. By the same token I believe in foxgloves.

I believe in lily-of-the-valley, be-

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cause it is fragrant, and hardy, and loves the shade.

I believe in corn-flowers—sometimes.

I believe in the perennial larkspur, because of the richness of its blue, but the annual larkspur is but a weak imitator.

I believe in the race of campanulas, because of their exquisite form and waxy texture.

I believe in the iris, though I have none, for it is a wonderful work of God.

I believe in the homely golden-glow, because it blooms so sunnily in the fence corner.

I believe in hollyhocks, because nothing looks so well against an old white house.

I believe in hardy chrysanthemums, because they defy the autumn frosts.

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I believe in dahlias, because I can pick them with a clear conscience.

I believe in China asters, because I love their colors. (I only wish they would grow on Long Island as they do down Boston way.)

I believe in morning glories, because they aspire to Heaven.

I believe in the California poppy, because it covers with green and gold the bare spots in my perennial bed.

I believe in the lowly nasturtium, because it gives and asks not, from June to November.

I believe in the sweet pea, because it is delicate in tint and in fragrance.

I believe in pansies, because children love their little faces.

I believe in the Shirley poppy, because of its fragile grace.

I believe in the cosmos, because it is the flower of Indian Summer.

I believe in the lilac, weigela, and

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syringa, because they love old door-yards.

I believe in flowers to the depth of my being, because they exist for beauty, and are perfect, complete things. They are generous and innocent and I can help them to grow. If there are no flowers in Heaven, I fear Eternity will find me casting a backward glance of regret at my little earthly paradise.

* * * *

[My mother, after she had read this creed, said, somewhat plaintively, "There are heliotrope and mignonette; don't you believe in those?" I do; and I believe also in a potted geranium in a window, for that usually means the loving care of somebody's mother—and I believe in mothers.]

REQUIESCAT IN PACE





Requiescat in Pace

THERE are two little graves in our back yard, just beyond the ash-bin, beneath a young ailanthus tree. Side by side sleep two whom we loved, albeit they loved not one another.



Nutty, the cat, we brought from our former domicile in an old cloth satchel with slits cut in it for air, and he came not willingly. He was a handsome cat, affectionate, and extremely talkative. Also he was

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of the night-prowling variety, but this is not the place to speak of his sins. He was a part of our family and we loved him.

There are good folk who detest cats, and it must be admitted that cats are selfish creatures. They are chiefly physical; their joys are those of the flesh; their spiritual nature has not been developed to the canine standard. But I, for one, find it hard to resist the charm of the cat's soft, sleek grace. There is something flattering in the way pussy selects your lap from a roomful, curls up and snuggles with an excess of comfort and, purring, falls asleep.

With all his selfishness, Nutty was faithful to his home. He was grateful for bed and board. He delighted our eyes with his playful antics in the yard. He made us feel that our company was acceptable. He was part

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and parcel of our household. He never hurt our feelings nor spoke evil of us behind our backs. There are humans in our town of whom I could not say as much.

In the late fall came Dusty Rhodes in a crate—an Airedale terrier puppy with a quizzical face and awkward legs. Nutty took to the kitchen, where dogs were not allowed, and thenceforth showed plainly that his nose was out of joint.

Dusty, I regret to say, was a wayward child. Strict obedience he never learned, though not because of stupidity. He took to shaking hands and begging quite readily.

But Dusty was a dog, a real dog. We had never owned a dog before because we had never owned a back yard before. One needs a back yard for a dog; a farm is better still.

Dusty was indeed a real dog—with

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all a dog's attachment to mankind. It is wonderful, when you come to think of it, that one of the lower animals should have so developed as to love man better than his own kind.

Transcendental philosophy attributes man's higher virtues to a soul apart from his brain, and rests content. But how about a dog's higher virtues, many of which he possesses in a degree to make his master ashamed? Love, forgiveness, moral courage, loyalty, faithfulness—are these not of the soul? Wiser men than I have been unable to answer. As for myself I am able only to marvel.

Dusty Rhodes was often a sore trial to us, both in sickness and in health, but in the few short months he was with us he surely found his way to our hearts. And when the

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distemper seized him, and we saw him suffer and waste away, with that look of pleading inquiry in his eyes, all was forgiven. In pain he died one night, and we buried him out in the back yard next day. It was not easy to drop the damp gravel on that poor shaggy little head, and we knew that we had lost something worth while. I wonder where the love and devotion went to when he breathed his last. It is a mystery.

Every hour thereafter we came upon reminders. Here was the little ball, here his collar, here his old shoe, here, alas, the little white whip. His place by the easy-chair knew him no more, neither the rug by the dining-room door, where he was wont to lie, more or less patiently, just out of bounds, till his turn should come.

Then came Nutty, the heartless

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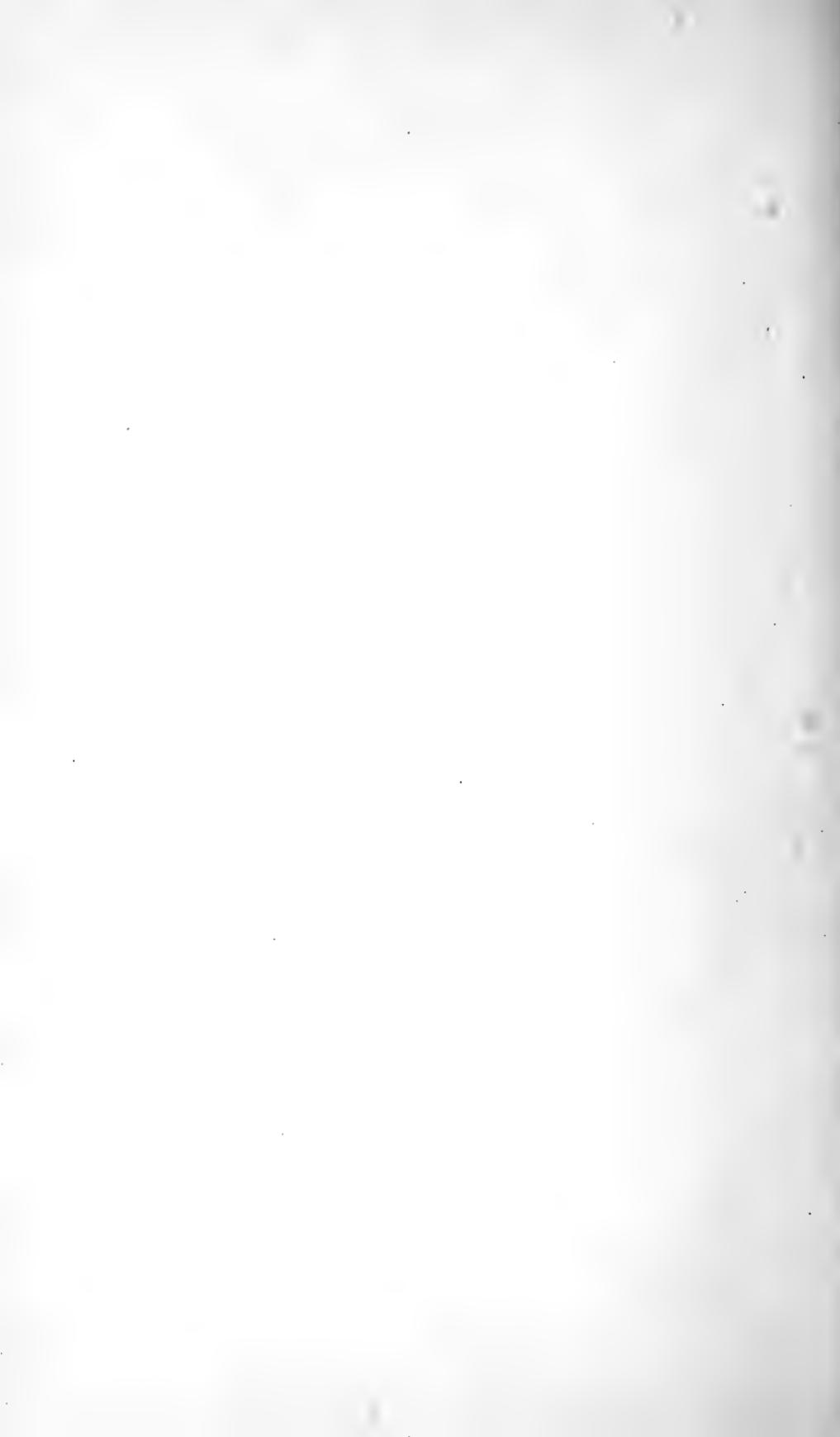
wretch, back to his own, cheerfully making himself at home in his old haunts. But the Reaper gathered him, too. One night he crawled off in evident bodily distress, and in the morning we found his stiffened form under the blackberry vines.

There lie their bones, side by side, in two little graves in our back yard. No marble shaft bears their names. No elegy was composed on the deceased. The world of men passes by our house and knows not of our humble tragedy. But we remember; we shall not forget. Always, while we live here, those bones shall lie undisturbed. Always there will be green and flowering growing things all about. And when evening comes and the street is still, I can linger there and fancy I feel against my leg the soft, repeated rubbing of a little cat, and within my hand the moist muzzle

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of a little dog. Better loves and memories like these in a quiet back yard than all the world beside and hatred therewith.

CLEANING UP





Cleaning Up

YOU can tell a good gardener from a poor one by the number of weeds visible in his garden, but I know a subtler way of judging. I apply my test in November. In the spring an army of gardeners marked out their rows and sowed their seed with enthusiasm. Then came the first crop of weeds, and a few weak brothers and sisters fell from the ranks after gathering a handful of spindly radishes.

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Then came more weeds, and a further defection.

In July came an early drought. The peas dried up, the lettuce wilted, and even the corn looked sickly. The salvation of the garden was water for the lettuce and faithful cultivation for the corn, and only the Old Guard stood by through the heat and burden of the day.

By fall only a remnant made any pretense at gardening. Beans and corn had been gathered; the tomatoes took care of themselves. Only the faithful kept up the fight for the love of it; only a tried and true Gideon's Band remained.

But it is after the first killing frosts that the true test comes. The corn-stalks stand brown and withered; the last ungathered tomato hangs shriveled upon its stem. The garden is a scene of desolation—a

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battle-field whence all have fled save the fallen. The dainty beauty of spring and the fulness of summer have departed. It is no place for the dilettante gardener; most of the back yards on our street are deserted.

But over in Neighbor Burt's yard I see a lonely figure poking around among the débris. (It was Neighbor Burt's Golden Bantam corn that beat us all.) Now he is standing amid the desolation like a widow in a graveyard. His loved ones are dead.

But Neighbor Burt is no faint heart. He is not mourning; listen, he is whistling. He is pulling up his dead plants and vines and piling them neatly for the burning. Soon an aromatic odor will be borne to me; Neighbor Burt will be burning sweet incense to Ceres. And I know that he will find something to do until the snow covers his garden—and then he

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will begin looking for next spring's seed catalogues to arrive and will begin planning what varieties of dahlia bulbs he will buy.

By these tokens I know that Neighbor Burt and I are two members of the Brotherhood of Year-Round Gardeners.

To me there is a vast deal of satisfaction in cleaning up. I crave orderliness as some folks crave excitement. And there is the satisfaction, too, that comes only from a work that is well done, completed, finished.

I believe that half our restlessness and discontent is due to our inability to finish things. Life is a ceaseless round; duties overlap and crowd each other. It is hard to get the breakfast dishes out of the way and the beds made before it is time to start dinner, and the average housewife is eternally oppressed with the haunt-

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ing realization of a hundred unfinished tasks. We men folks come home from the office or the shop with our minds full of things we have dropped in the middle, and some of us never finish them until some one folds our hands across our breast and says, "It is all over."

But the man or woman who works out-of-doors with things that grow and bear fruit may taste a little of the heavenly joy of things accomplished. For God, who is wiser than our other employers, has appointed the seasons, and has ordained that each year shall come to an end, whether we will or no.

The fruit ripens and is gathered; the leaves fall and the sap runs back into the roots. No overweening ambition, no feverish desire for more time, more time, can stop it. Soon comes winter to seal the earth in

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compulsory rest. But before it comes Neighbor Burt and I go forth into our gardens and clean up, and we alone of all the people on our block know the joy the craftsman feels when he puts the last fond touches on his work and sees that it is good.

WINTER



Winter



DECEMBER in our back yard is a cruel destroyer of illusions. The green draperies, with which nature clothed it, have worn out and blown away. All is bare and brown. Every rut and hollow shows in the lawn; the old pear-tree lifts crooked and decrepit branches like fingers knotted with pain; every place in the fence that needs repair obtrudes itself upon my guilty gaze; the green screen of the

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clematis has disappeared, disclosing the harsh outlines of a vulgar ash-bin. The garden has lost every little coquetry of leaf and flower, and has surrendered unconditionally to the drab unloveliness of middle age. The grace of growing things has departed and left the ugliness of decay.

Then comes the snow, winter's white Sister of Charity, to clothe the naked and to cover the face of the dead.

What a wonderful transformation our back yard undergoes during the first real snow-storm. All the little hollows and inequalities are filled, and a white lawn lies smoother than any greensward. Every harsh and awkward angle in fence and ash-bin and wood-pile is made smooth and round. English starlings, those whistling little brothers of the blackbird, come to the veiled garden in search of

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seeds. Even the gnarled old pear-tree takes on a sort of venerable beauty, such as soft, white hair gives to an old man. Bustling Boreas has left behind him a gentle peace.

I hope old age is going to be like that. If youth is feverish and fretful, and if middle age is a disillusionment and a bore (some say it is, though I don't believe it), there should come a time at length when the struggle is over and peace settles down upon the soul.

Down under the snow my bulbs are sleeping; the rose-bushes in their winter coverings are dreaming of June. Already I am beginning to look forward to my crocuses and bluebells and snowdrops, and the first green leaflets on the lilacs. I hope old age will not be deprived of a like vision of springtime, with blossoms and green fields—somewhere.

THE DEMOCRACY OF SNOW SHOVELING





The Democracy of Snow Shovelling

WONDER what it is about shoveling snow that exerts such a democratizing influence on mankind. Perhaps it is because only snow shovelers are abroad, and they are all proletarians. At any rate, there is something about the occupation that puts snobbishness to flight and seems to open men's hearts in a cheery good-fellowship. For there is a fraternity of shovelers which gathers in

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joyous conclave along our street when the snow ceases to fall and it is time to clean the walks.

The gas lamp in front of the house has just been lighted, and in its yellow glow I can see that only a few feathery flakes are falling. I don my sweater and gloves and arctics and old hat, take my shovel, and sally forth. The man next door is ahead of me, making a sort of rhythmic music on the flags.

“Quite a storm,” he calls across the white lawn.

As I finish the piazza and begin on the path to the front walk, our grocer passes.

“Good exercise,” he cries, and hurries on to his own.

A taxicab labors past, and Mr. Smith waves a friendly greeting from the window.

As I reach the sidewalk a Negro

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passes, bearing shovels and looking for a job.

“Some fall o’ snow, boss,” he ejaculates, and hastens on, chuckling at nothing at all.

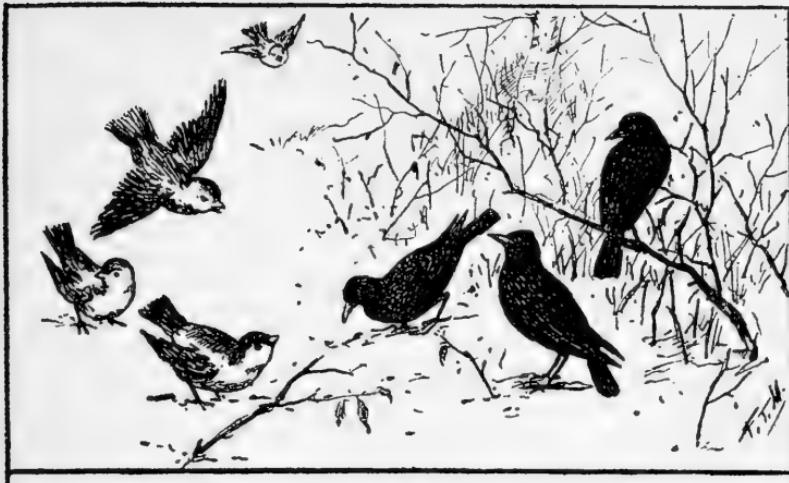
Two boys, trudging along with sleds, suddenly break into the road in a dash after a coal wagon, whose driver grins on them indulgently.

There is something about the end of a snow-storm, I think, that is stimulating. There is a quality in the clear, crisp air that elevates the spirits, tempting one to shout aloud and to laugh. And I am inclined to believe that its invigorating effects are felt to the full only by the man who steps forth with his shovel, calling greetings to his neighbors and bending his back to honest toil that sends the blood dancing through his veins and, for the moment at least,

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drives the blues and envies and mean-
nesses out of his heart and makes
him just one with all the other snow
shovelers of the universe.

FEBRUARY MENDICANTS



February Mendicants

LONG Island has its share of winter birds. Every farm seems to have its flock of crows. In the oak woods there are chickadees and juncos, and doubtless nuthatches and treesparrows and pine finches, though I have never observed them. But in our back yard we have only two species of bird visitors in winter—the English sparrows and the starlings.

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I hesitate to try to attract the chickadees and nuthatches with pans of tepid water and a free-lunch counter of suet and peanuts. I am afraid I would succeed only in attracting hundreds of sparrows, of which Madam thinks we already have enough. I must admit that they have an abominable habit of building nests in niches at the tops of the piazza posts, and scattering dirty straw, feathers, egg-shells, and even an occasional unfledged and deceased member of the family, about the piazza floor.

But we do throw out bits of toast and stale bread on the snow after breakfast, and for lack of more aristocratic visitors we welcome the sparrows. One cannot watch them and be entirely oblivious to their saucy grace.

The starlings may have been in

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league with the sparrows in Britain, before they came to Long Island a dozen years ago. At any rate, the two tribes seem to be able to live amicably in our town, though each would seem to be naturally of an aggressive and troublesome disposition. Most of our starlings apparently live in the spire of the Catholic church up the street; where the hordes of sparrows come from I cannot imagine.

When we throw out the crumbs the sparrows appear first. In fact, they have come to expect this daily feast, and early take up strategic positions on the ailanthus tree, the fence, and the crimson blackberry canes. They pounce upon the morsels greedily, the bolder ones first. Here and there a mimic duel is fought over an especially delectable crust; the more prudent spirits seize one big piece and fly

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off with it over the back hedge and out of sight.

The starlings come after the sparrows have sat down to meat, while there are still viands on the table. Big, fat fellows, they might easily drive off their smaller cousins, but for some reason they do not.

People hereabouts are beginning to complain about the starling. They say he bids fair to become as much of a nuisance as the English sparrow. I suppose that is so, and that a half dozen full-grown birds would make an excellent pot-pie. But I cannot feel otherwise than friendly toward my valiant little visitor. In February, when all the songsters have flown, and every other feathered friend except the sparrow has deserted our back yard, then comes John Starling, short-tailed, big-billed, plump, and happy, and sits

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and preens his feathers on the clematis trellis within full view of the kitchen window. He's a handsome vagabond, in his doublet and hose of glossy black velvet, and I like him.

I regret to say that even the starling finds it too cold to sing in mid-winter, though he and the other members of his lodge up in the steeple are voluble enough in their chirruping debates and discussions. I wish we might hear all winter that cheery, clear whistle with which he seems to amuse himself in the autumn and the spring.

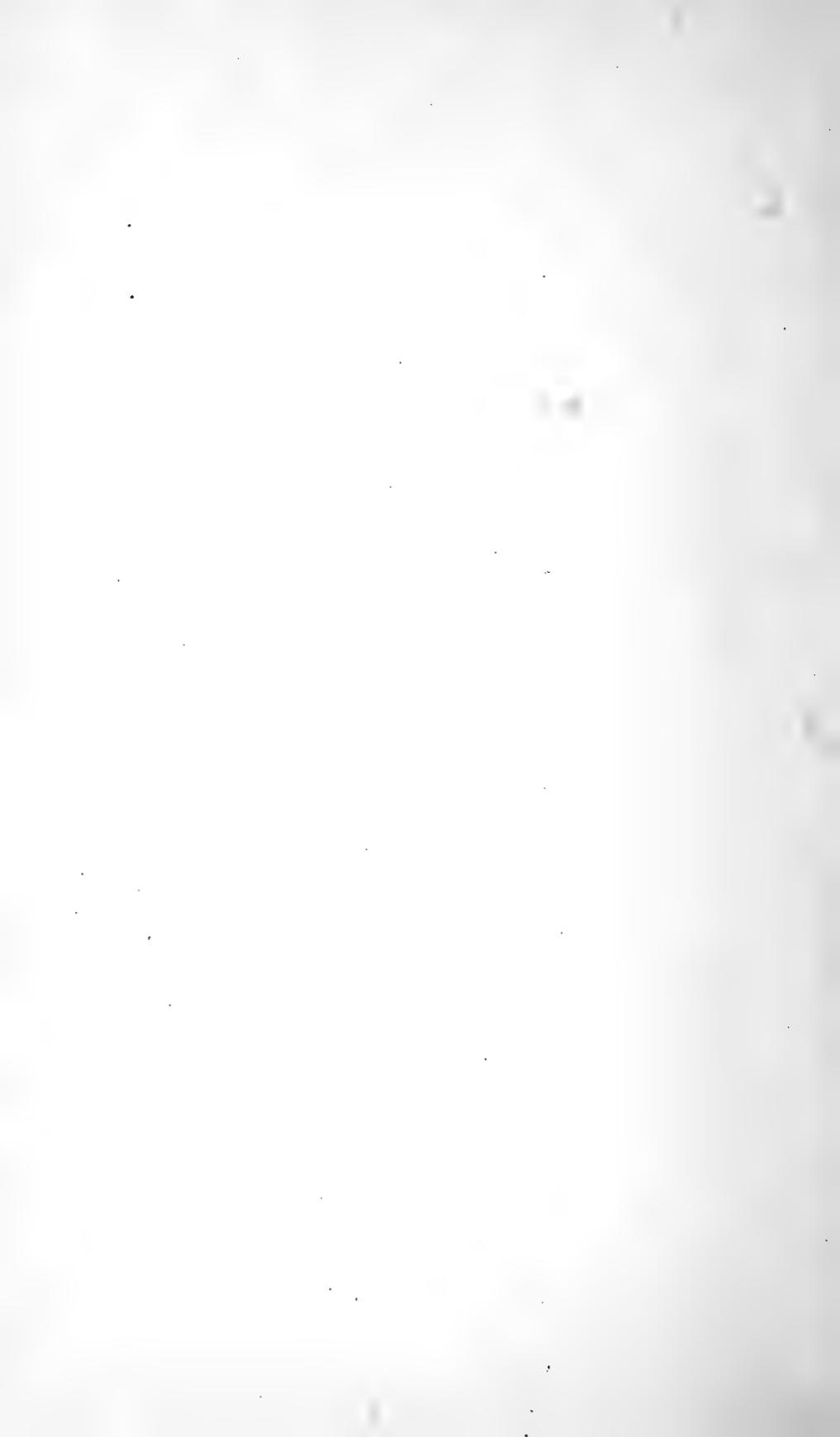
Ah well, they are brave little creatures, our birds. How they must suffer during some of our gales and snow-storms! But there they are again, next morning, as pert and chipper as ever, looking for alms with impudent, bright eyes.

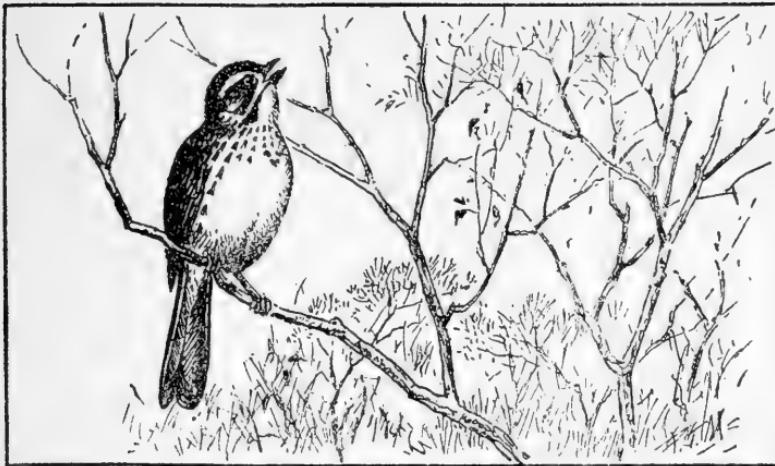
Friendly little sparrows, you have

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been faithful to us all through the winter, and we will not question your motives too searchingly. And in the spring, when the gaily dressed lords and ladies and opera singers of bird-dom arrive, we will not forget you. We are plain folk ourselves, and in our back yard we are no respecters of persons.

**THE SONG SPARROW AND
THE RYE**





The Song Sparrow and the Rye

THE last song we hear in the fall and the first in the spring is that of the song-sparrow. The robin is our happiest chorister, and the meadow-lark and oriole the most gladly welcomed, but the song-sparrow is the most faithful.

On a cold, raw morning in early March I heard him—long before the lilac buds had begun to swell or the grass to offer the least hint of green. The

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snow had hardly disappeared from the corners of the yard, and the land presented the towsled, unlovely appearance of a prematurely awakened earth.

But the song-sparrow knew that April was on the way. In his Southern home (he could not have gone far) some soft breeze had told him that winter was over and ended, and with no fuss or tarrying he came winging straight back to us, a diminutive embodiment of faith.

What a brave song of optimism it was! Perched on a limb of the leafless pear-tree he sang like an angel, fairly convincing us that the weather was growing warmer. The liquid melody rolled out like the loosened waters of a woodland brook. He sang and carolled of the leaves and the apple blossoms that he already saw

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in his prophetic vision. His voice vibrated with the rapture of the seer.

Brave little warbler! You teach us all a lesson. If we had a little of your buoyant faith, good times would always be upon us.

In a less audible manner, the rye I planted in the garden as a cover crop is announcing the spring every bit as confidently. Indeed, it has always been spring with the rye under the snow. Even the parsley succumbed to the frosts at Christmas, and the leaves fell at length from the honeysuckle vine, but the rye remained green and lush till the snow covered it.

Then, when the early thaws came, and the windy Month of Mud, the rye unfolded its blades in the first warm sunbeams as though it had only nodded in its chair, and it will have

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grown another inch before the crocuses are in flower.

The sturdy courage of the song-sparrow and the rye lends the bright touch of hope to our sodden March.

THE PASSING OF WINTER





The Passing of Winter

MARCH is a winter month with us, cold, raw, chilly, and often snowy, but it succumbs at length to April's smiles.

Then something begins to breathe a little in our back yard; Nature is stirring in her sleep. There is a prescient hush over the land, a hint of expectancy in the south wind.

The rye is already awake and growing; the lilac buds are swelling; the path to the

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back door is drying out; the song-sparrow is back; there is warmth in the sunshine now, and one little patch of snow lingers in the corner of the yard, like a lady's handkerchief in a deserted ballroom, as Blackmore puts it in "*Lorna Doone*."

"For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."

The Lady of the House wearies of the cold weather sooner than I do, but there is one thing I do become heartily tired of, and that is the sight of ailanthus trees in their winter nakedness. Most trees are beautiful in winter, particularly oak and birch and beech, with their dainty arabesques of branch and twig against the sky; but not so the ailanthus. It sheds all its twigs in the fall, and stands

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bare and utterly lacking in grace. At this moment I do not think of an uglier thing in nature than a leafless ailanthus—and the younger it is, the uglier. There are certain crookednesses about the old trees that may pass for design, but the young ones stick bald, knobby spikes into the air with utter shamelessness.

I am glad when green buds appear on the ailanthus trees, for I know that their spring clothing will soon be put on, and they will be at least decent if not beautiful. And I know I shall relent toward them later, as I always do, for the shade they furnish in burning July.

All of the signs of spring appear in their appointed order, and one morning, out on the front lawn, I detect bits of lavender and gold peeping through green jackets, and a day

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or two later come the first jolly
flowers of the year!

Oh, the crocus is a brave young lass,
Dressed in a yellow bonnet;
She smiles on all the folks that pass.
(The crocus is a brave young lass.)
She pokes her head up through the grass,
While yet the frost is on it.—
The crocus is a brave young lass,
Dressed in a yellow bonnet.

AVE ATQUE VALE





Ave Atque Vale

A



LAS, it is a world of change. Dusty and Nutty have departed to the Happy Hunting Grounds, and Sandy, the irrepressible terrier, reigns in their stead. Warm-hearted Irish Nellie went away to be married, and there were tears on both sides. Now we have begun talking of going up to the farm to live.

We have been longing for it, the wife and I. There is

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a broader outlook there, mountains, woods, and fertile acres that are our own. There is the growing orchard, a fairy-land in May, and there is mountain laurel among our pines. There will be bigger opportunities for us there than in this restricted space.

Ah, but it will sadden us to leave. We shall miss the pretty white house with its six Doric pillars in front. We shall miss the back yard where we wrestled with Apollyon, subdued the burdocks, and raised corn and roses. I shall never eat of the fruit of my vine; my roses will bloom for those who come after. *Sic vita.* I only pray that they may fall into loving hands.

Shall we be here to see another budding of the lilacs, another sowing of the seed? I know not. I only know that the time is coming when

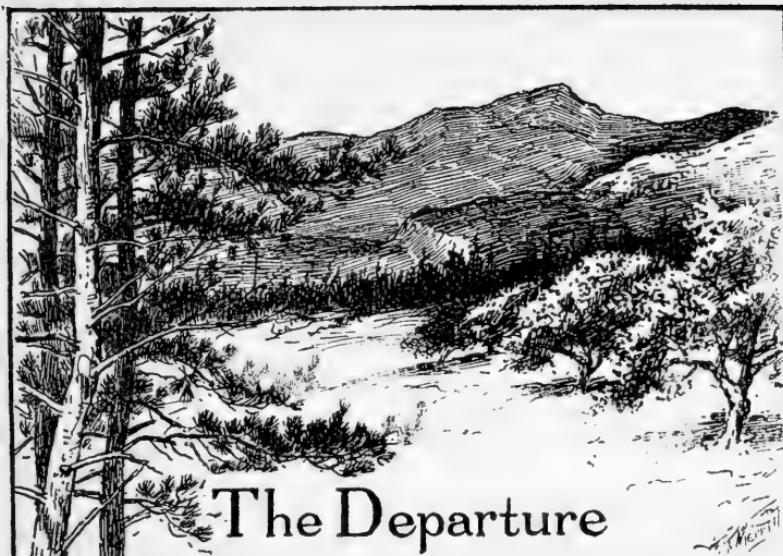
OF A BACK YARD

we must say farewell, little home.
Mayhap some of the love that has
dwelt here will cling 'round thee still,
to gladden other hearts in years to
come.



THE DEPARTURE





The Departure

THE sun has just come out after two days of gloomy weather. Last week we got four loads of well-cured hay safely in the barn, and to-morrow, weather permitting, the mowing-machine will be clattering again.



I am sitting in the open window of my new workroom (Madam abominates the word study), and my eyes wander out over our terraced lawn, past an old apple-tree whose

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fruit is just beginning to show a touch of color, across the brook and its bit of swamp where blue-flag lately bloomed, to a strip of our cultivated young orchard, the sandy road, and the trees and hills beyond. A robin hops along the clipped grass and a chipping sparrow is singing somewhere near. Madam, I think, is making butter.

It is good to be here on the farm; it is an old dream realized at last. But back in the minds of both of us a keen regret still lingers—the love of a white house on a shady village street, with a little, wayward back yard behind it, that lately we called home.

Perhaps not all people are as sentimental as we are. Perhaps not everyone will understand when I say that we cannot speak of that dear spot without a moistening of the eye and

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a tightening of the throat. It was only a rented place, but our lives took root there, and when we left it the roots proved to be as tenacious as those of an old burdock. A good deal of the devotion of two lives had gone into making it as beautiful and as homelike as we could.

I have just been reading over these humble annals, set down at intervals during the past four or five years, and they have brought it all vividly back to me, with all of the sorrow of parting.

I did not know that we would come to care so much. I did not know that we had made so many friends to regret our departure. I did not know how much it all meant to me—the familiar scenes of our village—the cheery “good-morning” at the street corner—the rooms wherein we worked and worried, lived and

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dreamed, and tasted the joys of contentment—the back yard that was our own little corner of God's out-of-doors.

We do not like to think of those last days of confusion. It was like hurrying through a funeral ceremony to be about new business. But we shall never forget the day the train carried us away from it all, with even our little dog Sandy left behind. And I know that we shall forever remain loyal to the home that was.

I have called them humble annals, and as I read them over I wonder if they are worth printing at all. There is nothing here of high adventure, I know, nothing of great accomplishment, nothing that tells of feverish passion or stirring action. But most of us lead humble, quiet lives, after all, and most of us, I believe, have felt the depth of that emotion which

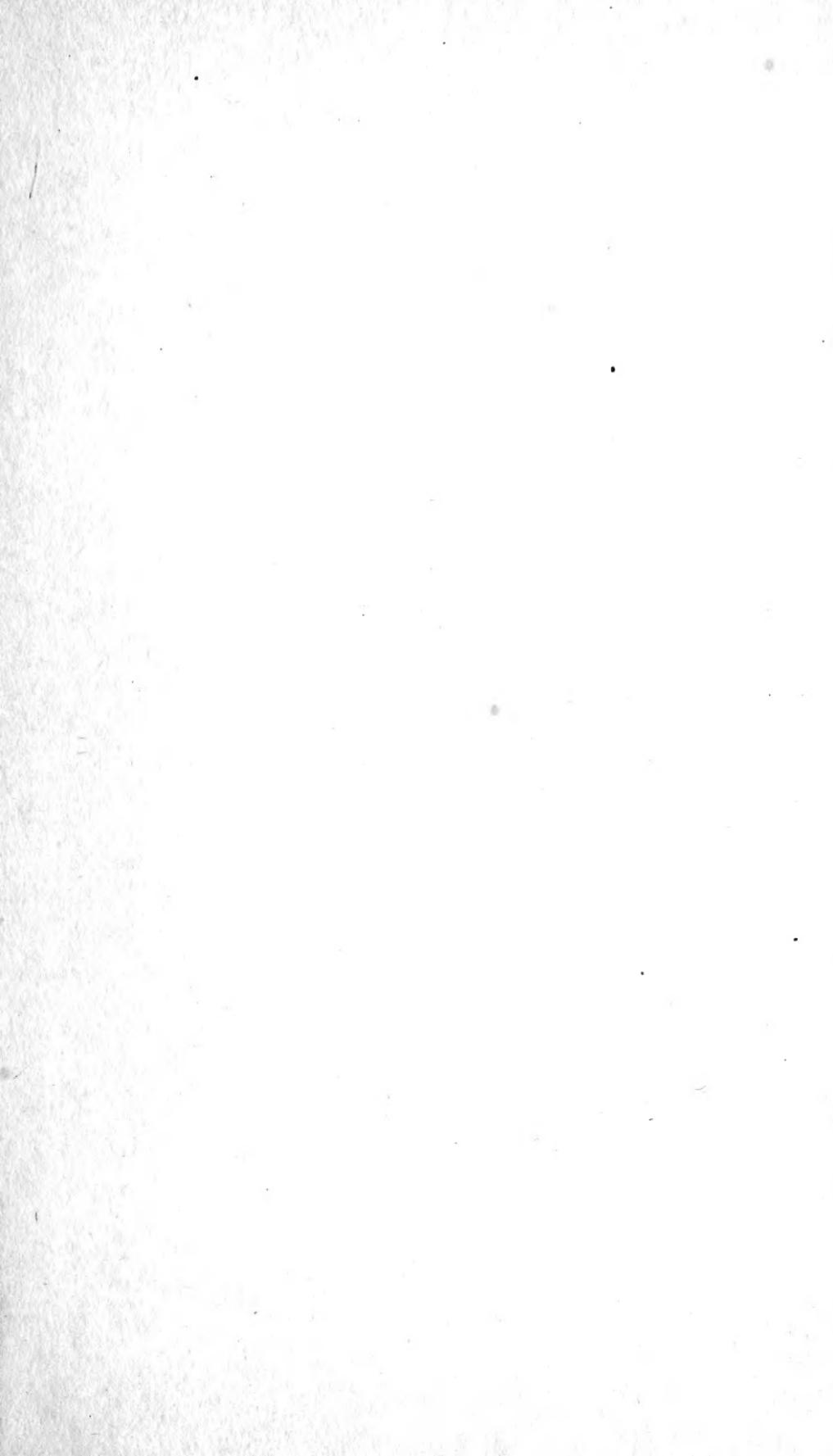
OF A BACK YARD

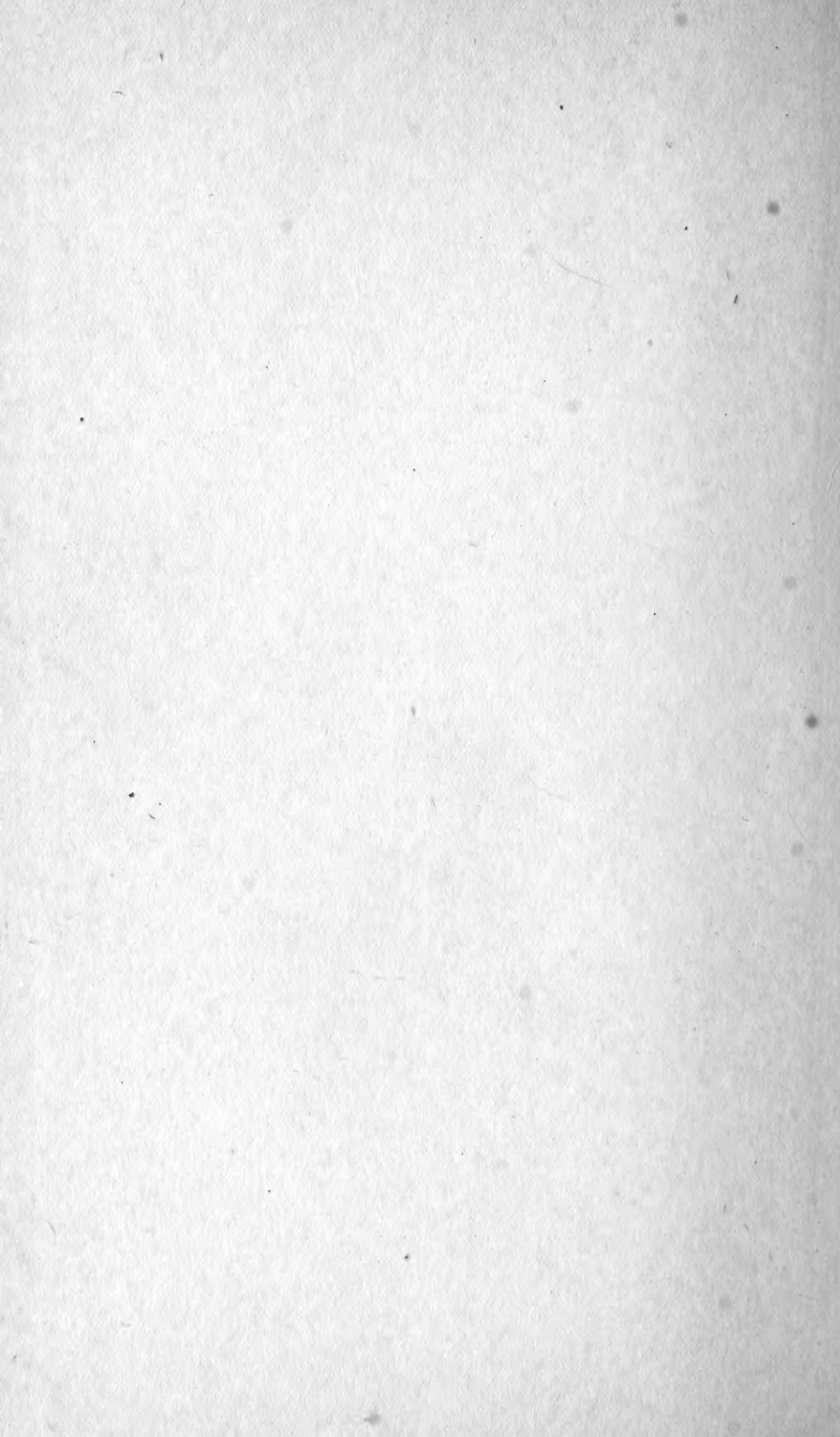
centers in the home. It is, indeed, one of the big, human things we have to be thankful for.

And so, without apology or justification, I close this little book, knowing that there will be some whose hearts will answer in a language that we both can understand.

THE END







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